

# Heilsbronn Model of Peer-to-Peer Counseling

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## Motives and goals

Long-distance runners need to learn to cope with their solitude. Professional life requires some of the endurance of a long-distance runner. It depends on us, whether we will grow lonely under such circumstances. In their professional lives, most people experience periods where resignation prevails, ideas run out and problems built up. However, there are also the pleasant times in which ideas will sparkle.

Teachers, pastors, social workers or people in other professions who work with people are often on their own during their preparations and at their workplaces.

In these situations processes within projects should be initiated and managed. Project work and team work (e.g. in confirmation classes) require the coordination of people and their skills. This approach improves interpersonal skills and enables dynamic development in groups as well as an improved learning process.

*Peer-to-Peer Counseling addresses such experience and developments.*

## Peer-to-Peer Counseling ...

- **promotes cooperation among colleagues**
- **creates solidarity**
- **prevents solitude**
- **provides relief**
- **solves problems**
- **supports and develops existing skills**
- **requires and develops professional discourse**

## Peer-to-Peer Counseling deals with professional issues

Professional day-to-day issues of group members provide the subjects for the teamwork.

The following issues may be the subjects of Peer-to-Peer Counseling: problems with interaction, relationships, personality and institutions within the professional field of the participants.

## Peer-to-Peer Counseling takes place within a group

Participation in Peer-to-Peer Counseling requires current professional practice.

The social form of the group provides – in contrast to individual conversations – stronger support and greater solidarity by joint involvement as well as more options in case work.

## Peer-to-Peer Counseling means case discussion

The job related problems are not dealt with on the basis of a general topic for all participants, but they are looked at based on an individual case presented and handled by individual group members.

Each session starts with the subjective, personal involvement of a group member in a situation within his/her day-to-day work. This situation, presented in a case report, will determine the subject for and the interaction of the group.

## Peer-to-Peer Counseling requires self-awareness

### *Personal involvement*

On the one hand, this means personal involvement of the participant presenting a case. It is, e.g., not a matter of „problem students per se“, but of “problem students for me“. On the other hand, self-awareness also constitutes the base for handling such a case within the group. Thereby, the process of group interaction triggered by the reporting person will turn into the central field of experience for that person. Through such a process, each participant will also learn about him-/herself, by the way of interacting within the group, and by the way in which the other participants respond and interact among each other.

### *Coping with and making changes in day-to-day life*

Peer-to-Peer Counseling is intended to help coping with and changing the day-to-day life within an institution. To accomplish this, psychological, sociological and pedagogical aspects have to be integrated into analysis and case handling. During the course of counseling, the members of the group will provide their contributions. Peer-to-Peer Counseling therefore avoids considering a problem to be solely the result of the individual and personal inadequacies of a particular group member.

### *Perception and previous experience*

An example from school environment:

A class that sabotages the instructions of a new teacher, rejects the suggestions of that teacher, and responds with lack of discipline, perceives the „new one“ primarily to be a representative of institutionalized authority. Such perception is associated with the previous experience of the students. It is determined by a relationship bearing a latent conflictive nature, which is possibly connected to the previous socialization by school as an institution. It is possible that the teacher experiences this student behavior solely to be an act of personal humiliation and harassment on the background of the teacher’s personality deficiencies („I am just not assertive enough“). In this case, the complex causes in the development of conflicts, dysfunctions and difficulties are being neglected considerably.

## Conclusion

- Peer-to-Peer Counseling aims at a more differentiated perception of one's own behavior, of one's own feelings, stimuli, reactions, fantasies, as well as those of others, and aims also at a more differentiated perception of the subconscious aspects of a problematic situation.
  - Peer-to-Peer Counseling intends to reveal latent expectations, goals, motivations, etc.
  - A more realistic assessment of one's own behavior and potential is required in developing a substantial behavioral repertoire, which allows adequate problem solving in different situations.
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## Heilsbronn Model of Peer-to-Peer Counseling

The Heilsbronn Model of Peer-to-Peer Counseling was developed in various phases by working with students and practicing it with colleagues. Differentiated job-related experiences and counseling approaches have eventually led to this model, which has been worked with successfully in diverse professional contexts since 1985.

The guidelines lead the users via 10 steps through the process of Peer-to-Peer Counseling. An exact time line, rules which have to be respected and precise operating procedures facilitate cooperation. Three clearly defined roles (moderator, person presenting the case, and counselor) support cooperation.

This model thrives on practice. Practice creates confidence within the group and helps to experience meaningful and relieving guidance by the 10 steps.

When practicing it together, each person will discover his / her own scope for potential associations, fantasies and similar ideas.

It is important to follow the order of the steps, (so as) not to provide „pseudo solutions“ already at the beginning, and thereby anticipating inadequate solutions.

The phase of reflecting solutions is intentionally placed at the very end, in order to achieve a solution suitable for the person presenting the case.

Part of this reflection phase is also remembering one's own examples („that has happened to me before“) at the very end of the process, because „genuine solutions“ would be prevented otherwise. The case presented should take center stage, and similar individual experiences should not be talked about until the very end. This counseling sequence creates more empathy and solidarity.

A group size of 5 – 7 persons is helpful. Anything discussed within the group is subject to confidentiality, which has to be agreed upon and respected by all members.

Groups for Peer-to-Peer Counseling should meet on a regular basis. A 14-day interval eases case reflection. For a start, 10 meetings may be agreed upon. Following an evaluating discussion, more sessions may be arranged.

It is a unique feature of the Heilsbronn Model that it can also be used online with good results. When using the online version, we also recommend visiting the online conference venue regularly.

More information is available at:

[www.kollegiale-beratung.online](http://www.kollegiale-beratung.online)

Here, we again meet the aforementioned long-distance runner with his/her efforts to overcome solitude. To all professional long-distance runners: I wish you good luck. Enjoy your training of Peer-to-Peer Counseling.

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### **Institute for Peer-to-Peer Counseling Inc.**

The institute was established in 2008 to be a registered non-profit association. It is the purpose of this institute to foster Peer-to-Peer Counseling as an instrument of personnel development within public and private institutions and organizations.

[www.institut.kollegiale-beratung.net](http://www.institut.kollegiale-beratung.net)

In cooperation with Religionspädagogisches Zentrum Heilsbronn: [www.rpz-heilsbronn.de](http://www.rpz-heilsbronn.de)

Your feedback regarding the Heilsbronn Model of Peer-to-Peer Counseling will be very much appreciated. It will help us to further develop the concept of Peer-to-Peer Counseling.

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